

Long Island Sound

Cable lines, clams, oysters, and lobsters continue to be “hot” issues. Connecticut environmentalists wonder “when will it be our turn?” Enough criticisms have come from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and New York officials, but no one has answered why the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers stipulated that the cable be buried at a depth of 48-feet in New Haven Harbor. The Corps has documents in their own office showing bedrock in New Haven harbor is at 38-39-feet and that 48-feet is unobtainable unless the rock is blasted; the Corps has never been called to answer that discrepancy. Also, Fish and Wildlife (federal) approved the laying of the cable during a period of maximum detrimental effect on all fisheries – and no one has called them to account, either.

Somebody should also make the utilities account for their violations and malfeasance in their offices. They have failed to stand up to the requirements of their contracts – they should be forced to remove the cable.

In addition, FERC has pre-empted our state’s rights by approving a gas line that is not acceptable to all Connecticut regulatory agencies, a gas line that is not needed because we already have a gas line from Milford to Northport, Long Island, New York that is utilized to less than 50% capacity. The owner of that gas line (Iroquois Gas) has offered to carry the gas necessary from the Islander East proposal to Long Island with little or no additional construction necessary. The offer has been refused. Maybe the State of Connecticut



Senator Gunther (middle) with Morgan Kaolian (left) of Long Island Sound America, Inc. and John Toth (right) of Clean Sound, Inc. en route to Pleasure Beach for a Clean-Up Day

should threaten to secede from the Union unless our state’s rights as guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution are honored!

“When will our turn come?”

State Senator George L. “Doc” Gunther

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State Senator

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State Senator

George L. “Doc” Gunther

Dear Constituents/Friends:

As of the writing of this newsletter, the bi-partisan Committee of Inquiry consisting of members of the House of Representatives is working hard gathering facts about Governor Rowland's alleged improprieties. The Committee deadline for completion of its work is June 30; if it recommends impeachment, the House will convene, and if the House adopts Articles of Impeachment, the Senate will conduct a trial on those charges. I believe the Committee is conducting its work with fairness, impartiality, and thoroughness; its recommendation will be a key factor in the outcome of this long and sad process.

Meanwhile, with all the hubbub surrounding the Governor's story, major bills that should have been fully discussed and acted on weren't. Activity in the General Assembly was many times pre-empted by news about the Governor. Newspapers covered the corruption story as it unfolded at the expense of keeping the public up-to-date on pending legislation.

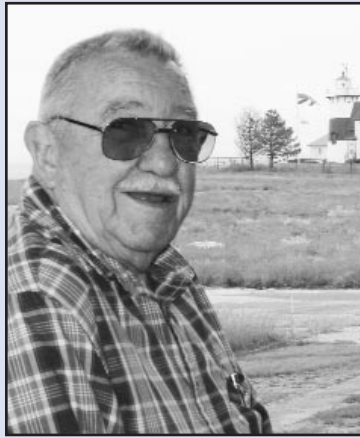

On a positive note – the state budget did not include any new taxes and the property tax exemption was returned to \$500.

Public input into legislation was wiped out due to lack of participation. The public hearing process became a sham. The hearings were poorly conducted, lasting overly long because chairmen did a poor job, allowing the speakers to go on well beyond the allotted time and allowing agency and department spokespersons to infringe on the public portions of the hearings. In addition, most committee members, regardless of committee, did not attend the hearings at all or else left after a few minutes, leaving the public to talk to a couple of committee members and to themselves.

For example, at the public hearing that included the stem cell bill that Rep. Larry Miller and I had sponsored, a bill that was of enormous import to medical research and development of new medical techniques to treat deadly diseases, the bill was not heard until 7 P.M. Medical experts were kept waiting for 9 hours and, when they finally testified, only 4 committee members were there to hear them and ask questions.

The lack of public interest, the willingness of legislators to listen to special interests without considering both sides of an issue, the callousness of the leadership in not scheduling sessions in a timely fashion (i.e., calling a legislative session for noon and not starting on legislation until 8 P.M..or later, and continuing until 2 or 3 A.M. either because they were not prepared or because key legislators who are lawyers were tied up in court), all tend to discourage the general public from becoming involved and to discourage good people from seeking elective office.

Sincerely,



Medical Malpractice

Another critical issue facing us today is the continuance of good medical care in Connecticut and the impact of medical malpractice on our health care delivery system. Medical malpractice insurance in Connecticut is in crisis; recognizing this, four legislative committees struggled with the issue, to no avail. Politics and powerful lobbies interfered; a small group of leaders met to try for a compromise; a do-nothing bill was then passed; and the Governor vetoed it. Once again, the public is not given any relief from soaring medical costs.

People want – and deserve – the best medical care they can afford. Doctors want to serve their patients and deliver the best medical care for which they are trained. Insurance companies need to cover their costs. Lawyers want to earn the best living they can.

Put all four of these elements together – and the lawyers are winning. Why? People can't afford health care unless they are insured; doctors can no longer afford to practice in Connecticut and new doctors are by-passing our state because liability insurance premiums keep escalating too fast (all but two insurance companies have stopped writing medical liability policies in Connecticut because of the exorbitant awards given by juries); and lawyers continue to collect outrageous fees. The emphasis is on suing after the fact rather than prevention.

It is not a well-known fact, but lawyers collect one-third of an award for pain-and-suffering as well as one-third of amounts awarded by juries to cover present and future *medical* expenses resulting from the injury. This is unconscionable to my way of thinking, and adds enormously to the costs of medical care. Annual liability insurance costs for some doctors have risen from \$45,000 to more than \$150,000 in less than 3 years time. Doctors can no longer afford to practice in Connecticut and are leaving the state and new doctors are going elsewhere. The most affected specialties are obstetrics/gynecology and neurological surgery. I am in favor of patients being properly compensated but I am not in favor of the lawyers benefiting so obscenely from someone else's pain and suffering. And, yet – that is what happened in the Legislature – the attorneys' lobby won. There has been no action to curb medical costs. The bill that passed the Legislature was a cruel hoax on the public – it even raised the costs to patients.

I had submitted a bill to curb medical malpractice costs that would have taken into account all the parties involved. My bill would have required the Medical Examining Boards to be independent from the Department of Public Health and to be allowed to police themselves, allowing them to discipline and eliminate the few incompetent members of their professions who are producing the major problems; put a statutory limit on attorneys' fees; establish a pre-screening board to eliminate frivolous cases; and, finally, establish an arbitration board to hear major cases, taking a majority of the malpractice cases out of the court process. Unfortunately, the committees involved eliminated the most important points, refusing to address the larger issues and, instead, attacked the problem piecemeal.

I support the Governor's veto and believe that a necessary part of any successful solution is a cap on non-economic damages.

Stem Cell Research

Separation of church and state are keystones of our Constitution. People who blindly accept the dictates of one religion or another without being able to think of the broader issues, the morality and the ethics, and the greatest good for the greatest number, should not impose their doctrines on others. They do not belong in the legislative decision-making process. And yet, several excellent bills were defeated because of outside pressures that bore little or no relevance to the facts of the issues.

One such bill was the one Rep. Larry Miller and I co-sponsored legalizing embryonic stem cell research and banning human cloning in Connecticut. New Jersey and California have already enacted such laws. 30 other states are considering similar legislation.

Adult stem cell research is already occurring at Yale and UConn Schools of Medicine and has shown promising results in repairing multiple organs. Embryonic stem cells, known as blastocysts and grown in petri dishes, have the capacity to greatly advance research into causes and potential treatments and cures for such diseases as cancer, strokes, diabetes, leukemia, coronary heart disease, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, etc. Work on both kinds of cells, embryonic and adult, is vital and invaluable in medical research. Passage of this bill would have allowed our universities to attract topnotch biomedical scientists and leaders in the stem cell field.

The Connecticut Legislature gave up national and international leadership on this issue by not passing this bill. Opponents listened to the distortions and lies perpetrated by Catholic coalition lobbyists and missed a golden opportunity to put Connecticut in the forefront of cutting-edge research to alleviate pain and suffering and save lives. Two premier universities and 26 biotechnology, pharmaceutical, and health-related corporations with research and development facilities are located in Connecticut. Biotechnology is an industry of considerable importance and is the wave of the future. We deserve to be in on the ground floor, but defeat of this bill resulted in a setback.

State Properties Review Board

The State Properties Review Board, designed to oversee state contracts in leasing, purchase, and sale of state properties, creation of which I sponsored in the 1970's to stop abuses in state leasing, has been taking several "hits" in the last few years. Even though this Board has saved the state millions and millions of state taxpayer dollars through the years, the Administration and the Legislature have conspired to eliminate the Properties Review Board from reviewing the contracts in several major projects. Projects such as Adriaen's Landing in Hartford which included the UConn football field at Rentschler Field in East Hartford, UCONN 2000 (\$1 billion project), community college in Hartford, DOT projects, and many others did not receive the cost-savings analysis by the Review Board.

If this Board had been allowed to review all state property projects, as mandated by law, perhaps the State would not be suffering through the potential influence-peddling problems we read about almost daily.

This year, the Government Administration and Elections Committee expressed great interest in the bill I had sponsored calling for strengthening of the Properties Review Board, but the Chairs at the last minute, in the last hour of the last day of the session, deleted this provision from one of their bills. So much for everyone's lip service to stopping corruption and eliminating payola!